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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 001657

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: SEVEN OPPOSITION MPS END THEIR BOYCOTT OF
PARLIAMENT AS AMENDMENT DISCUSSION CONTINUES

REF: YEREVAN 1593

Classified By: DCM A.F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) The seven MPs of the opposition National Unity Party officially ended their 19-month boycott of parliament on September 12. Their return comes as the National Assembly continues discussion of a draft constitutional amendments package (ref) and local media and observers devote more attention than usual to Armenia's legislature. National Unity Party leader Artashes Geghamian insisted that the decision to return was in no way linked to the rumored discussion of whether the GOAM can strip boycotting MPs of their mandates after prolonged absences. He instead described the move as instead a "response to requests from his constituents." Geghamian told Emboffs that his party will call on the GOAM to hold extraordinary presidential and parliamentary elections following the referendum on the constitutional amendments currently scheduled for November.

JUSTICE BLOC: BOYCOTT A-LA-CARTE

12. (C) A Justice Bloc spokesperson confirmed to us September 12 that its 14 MPs were also considering a return but had opted instead to attend sessions that they considered "important" while nominally maintaining their boycott for an indefinite period. Justice Bloc leader Stepan Demirchian had made brief appearances in the National Assembly hall during the (widely televised) second reading of the constitutional amendments package in mid-August but has otherwise steered clear of parliament since February 2003. (Note: Demirchian, like many other opposition MPs, temporarily suspended his boycott during the parliamentary hearings on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict earlier this year. End Note.)

COMMENT: OPPOSITION FISSURES STILL CLEARER THAN GOALS

13. (C) Geghamian's decision to return to the parliament has, for the moment, offered a badly needed boost to his political profile (after months of obscurity in the public eye). This attention but could prove short-lived, however, unless the media continue to cover parliamentary proceedings with regularity. While international observers will welcome his party's return to parliament, his track record in parliament for constructive dialogue has been uneven. What is clear from his public and private comments is that his party continues to struggle to define its relationship with the opposition Justice Bloc. The opposition's mantra about Kocharian's "illegitimacy" still does not include a well-defined opposition platform nor specific policy goals. Some opposition leaders are now calling for an outright boycott of the November referendum on the constitutional amendments in hopes to unite opposition supporters, discredit the Kocharian administration, and "force" a set of extraordinary elections. With a large group of opposition MPs now back in parliament, another group still boycotting, and others yet undecided, we continue to predict that this scenario is unlikely.

EVANS